

Prevention Pathways

Online Courses

FACT SHEET

Creating a Safety Plan

Women who are at risk of violence need to have a safety plan.¹ The plan should list steps to take if a partner or husband becomes violent or abusive. It should also include teaching children how to call 9-1-1 for help. Women who experience dating violence or other forms of abuse also need a safety plan.

Safety During a Violent Incident

You don't have control over your partner's violent actions. However, you *can* control how you prepare for your safety and the safety of your children.

- **If you think an argument may become violent, stay out of rooms that may contain possible weapons.** This would include the kitchen, bathroom, and garage. Try to go to a room with an exit.
- **Practice getting out safely.** Which doors, windows, stairwells, and elevators will you use?
- **Keep your purse and car keys close by** and always keep an extra car key hidden in a safe place.
- **You may need to tell a neighbor to call the police if they hear suspicious noise coming from your home.** This may be difficult for you to reveal, but it is a very important step. Have a code word that will alert them to call the police. Make sure your children also know the code word and how to call 9-1-1.

Safety: If You Are Planning To Leave

Some women decide that the best safety plan is to leave. Because a man often becomes more violent when he suspects his partner is leaving (it represents a loss of his control), it is important to prepare carefully.

- Leave money, an extra set of keys, an extra set of clothes, and copies of important papers (see list below) with someone you trust at least several days before you plan to leave.
- If you don't already have one, open a bank account in your name only.
- Determine who might be able to loan you money or give you a place to stay.
- Keep change for phone calls since credit cards or calling cards will show up on phone bills.

Items to Take When Leaving (Give them to someone you trust for safekeeping.)² Personal ID, licenses, Social Security cards, birth certificates of all children and yourself, keys (house, car, office, etc.)

- All bank cards, credit cards, savings and checking account information
- Lease, rental agreements, house deed, mortgage papers
- Insurance forms and information
- All school forms, records of all children's shots and medications
- Immigration documents/green card, visa
- Welfare documents
- Marriage license or divorce papers or other court documents (protective orders, etc.)
- Clothing for you and your children
- Comfort items for your children
- Phone numbers and addresses of family, friends, and community resources

Safety In Your Own Residence³

When you make the decision to end an abusive relationship and you plan to stay in your residence, you will need to take other precautions. You may need to obtain a protective order or peace order, both of which are court documents that provide relief to women who are experiencing abuse. Your local District court and/or local domestic violence agency can help you with this. All protective orders order an abuser to stop threatening or committing

abuse. They also require an abuser to end all contact with the victim. However, a protective order does not guarantee your safety. In addition, there are other precautions you should take:

- **Change the locks on all doors and windows**, and install or improve security to include better outside lighting.
- **Purchase rope/chain ladders to permit escape from a second story window**, if it becomes necessary.
- **Talk to all childcare providers and schools** about who has permission to pick up the children.
- **Use your community domestic violence resources** for legal advice.
- **Cover the mailbox with brightly colored paper** to make it easier for the police to find the house if you live in a rural area where only the mailbox can be seen from the street.
- **Keep the protective or peace order with you at all times.**
- **Tell your neighbors or landlord that your partner no longer lives with you** and ask them to call the police if they see him at your home.

Safety on the Job⁴

At some point, you may need to tell your boss, workmates, or a mental health professional in your company's Employee Assistance Program about the

abuse. The more people who know of your situation, the safer you may be.

- **Make sure you list your workplace on the protective order.** Give copies to your boss and security people at your job. Also give them a picture of the abuser.
- **Review the safety of the parking lot or garage.** If possible, arrange for someone to walk you to and from the parking lot and the office.
- **Try to move to another, less visible office** if your office or desk can be seen from the street or parking lot.
- **Try to change your work schedule** so you do not arrive and leave work at the same time each day.
- **Add caller ID to your phone service and save all faxes and/or e-mails** that may give you legal proof that the man is disobeying the no-contact rule of the protection order.
- **Review the safety of your childcare plan.** Make sure the protective order includes all important addresses. This would also include your child's school and/or day care address.

For more information, go to

www.samhsa.gov/preventionpathways and click on "courses" to find Module 9 of the online course, "It Won't Happen to Me: *Substance Abuse and Violence Against Women*."

References

¹ Fazzzone, PA, Holton, JK, and Reed, BG. (1997). Substance abuse treatment and domestic violence. Treatment improvement protocol series 25. (DHHS Publication No. SMA 97-3163). Rockville, MD: Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.

² United States Office of Personnel Management. (2003). Work/life programs. Responding to domestic violence: Where federal employees can find help. Washington, DC: Author. Available at www.opm.gov/workplac/html/domestic.asp

³ Seymour, A., Murray, M., et. al. (2000). National victim assistance academy, text supplement, (Chpt. 9). Washington, DC: Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

⁴ United States Office of Personnel Management. (2003).